OUR SERIALS

A VISION.

She slipped across the doorstep
A being of light and bloom,
Bright as the noonday whiteness
That flooded my quiet room.
Slim and rosy and dimpled
She stood beside the door,
And I looked and greatly wondered
Had I seen the child before.

Back in my heart's far corner
A faint sweet fragrance stirred,
As the little one kept gazing,
Saying never a word.
Her eyes were blue as heaven,
Sun-tinted was her hair,
Quaint as an old-time picture
She stood, and blossom-fair.

A little red frock was on her,
An apron white and frilled.
I sprang from my chair to greet her,
My soul with ardor thrilled.
But lo! the vision vanished,
I looked through empty space
Where the doorway had been shining
In the beauty of her face.

Then swiftly I remembered—
Though many a mile and long
Has been the path I've traveled
From the land of morning song—
That little red frock and apron,
Those fearless eyes were mine,
When childhood's rare enchantment
Made common things divine.

'Tis a far cry to the garden
Where the Eden roses blow;
But if we have had its freedom
In the beautiful long ago,
Still in the cloistered stillness
Of our lives the angels talk,
Still, with the Lord of angels
There are days when we fearless walk.

Lost on the world's wide desert,
Shall I find the child again?
Is she somewhere safe and waiting
Beyond the world of men?
When I reach life's latest way-mark,
And face life's latest day,
Shall the eyes I lift to heaven
Be brave as a child's at play?
—Margaret E. Sangster, in Chicago Interior.

The Hermit

A Story of the Wilderness

By CHARLES CLARK MUNN

Author of "Pocket Island," "Uncle Terry" and "Rockhaven."

CHAPTER XXXVI.—CONTINUED.

Martin also arose.

"Be calm, dear Angie," he said, "be calm. It is blessed news I am trying to tell you. That poor old hermit is—is your father."

For one moment she gazed at Martin with wide-open, terrified eyes, the next on her knees with her head in Aunt Comfort's lap, sobbing.

Then came Aunt Comfort's heart-burst, and all the years of her kindly patient life of love and hope were condensed into few words. For with hands upraised and eyes closed she whispered, "O God, I thank Thee for this blessed news and all Thy goodness. O God, I thank Thee!" And then she, too, was sobbing.

Martin turned away with misty eyes. He had heard prayers, but never one that touched his heart like this.

It was all over in less time than the telling, yet a lifelong drama was enacted in those few moments, and when Angie arose again—her face wet with tears and eyes still brimming—she looked glorified. She could not speak, but two hands were extended to Martin, and as he clasped them, the long ago of first love and the now of stronger love were joined.

"I can't thank you now, dear friend," she said, brokenly, "but I shall, never fear, I shall."

It was midnight ere they parted; when she again stood before the open fireplace where only white ashes remained, and glanced at the tall clock, she heard not its solemn voice, for a new life, a new joy, and a wondrously blessed hope had come to her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A CONFESSION.

Martin's first return and wooing of Angie naturally interested all Greenvale, but the news of his discovery of the long-lost Amzi was, as he expected, a veritable bombshell. No one except Aunt Comfort and Angie learned of it until the next day, and then Dr. Sol, so to speak, was the one to sound the alarm. And no medicine he ever gave had quite such an electrical effect. Men driving on the highway were halted by others and told; women scurried across fields to neighbors' houses bareheaded to carry the news; Squire Phinney's store became a local point where dozens gathered to hear the joyful tidings told and retold again and again, and Angie, on her way to school, had to give up and tarry for congratulations. And so cordial were they, so warm a spot did she hold in Greenvale's heart, that women insisted on embracing and kissing her in the street, and when she finally reached the schoolhouse, one of the committee was there awaiting her and declared the school closed for that day. She had walked there as her duty called, but she rode home, the cynosure of all eyes along the way, with most of her pupils following.

Martin also received an ovation wherever he went, and when he halted to describe the hermit home of Amzi, and tell the tale over and over again, as perforce he had to, men left their work, and women and children their houses, to gather close and listen. He was really the hero of the hour, and his efforts to save Angie her heritage—now known to all—his wisdom in not even hinting his suspicions of who the hermit was until proved true, and forethought in taking old Cy into the wilderness to care for him, were all a matter of comment.

By night the public sentiment had crystallized into a general invitation to all to meet in the town hall, and listen to Martin's telling his story in coherent order and in full. He rather laughingly consented, and for an hour held the unique gathering spellbound. At its close Parson Jones was called upon, as might be expected, and uttered a fervent prayer of thankfulness, and in it ascribing Martin's intuitions and actions, as a pertinent example of divine interposition, and when amen was reached, called upon all to join in "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

It was rendered with unusual fervency, while Aunt Comfort wiped her tears away, and when the audience dispersed, Martin walked home with her. Angie was not present, for she was in a state of almost mental collapse and for ample reason.

Collectively it was an exhibition of public sentiment and kindly feeling, the like of which could nowhere else be found. Greenvale had for many long years felt that a blemish rested upon it, and, like poor dog Tray, realized the stigma David Curtis was responsible for. He had met a just and well-merited fate, and the general belief was that conscience had driven him insane. Angie, well beloved, had come into her rights, and at the hands of a long-faithful lover, who now hoped to become a citizen of that village. Aunt Comfort, too, was in a fair way to receive due reward for her unfailing charity and general benevolence, and all in all—though slightly bigoted—Greenvale stood ready, like the rest of humanity, to applaud and reward all goodness and condemn all vice.

But there was another, and to Martin even more interesting, conclusion yet to be settled, and alone in Aunt Comfort's warm sitting room that night they discussed it. What it was need not be specified, but at the close of Martin's plea for Angie's consent and speedy marriage, although she permitted his arm-clasp, she shook her head.

"No, no," she said, "not yet. Once you left me without thought or care and now let us try being lovers again. I was forced to try to put you out of my mind and heart once, and I wouldn't care to live through another such experience.

"Beyond that, I have Aunt Comfort, and no love can set aside my duty to her. She has been my mother since a child, I am all there is in life for her, and her care and happiness is sacred and must be to me so long as I live. You have brought to me also another duty, and that, my poor father. I shall not rest, or feel a moment's content, until he is here and under my care. You tell me he is almost demented, but contented where he is, yet he is very old, and to let him remain and die in that miserable abode is out of the question. I would start and walk to where he is, if it were possible, and he must be brought here before I shall know a moment's peace."

In vain Martin pleaded that marriage would be no bar to this double claim; her duty must and would be his as well and that Aunt Comfort would be the happier for this consummation. It was futile, for all his specious pleadings and promises availed not. Duty to those already dependent upon her for happiness was her guiding star and watchword, and Martin had to yield and accept it.

She even refused to be considered as engaged, and her reasons for it are worth quoting.

"A verbal bond has no strength," she said, "unless reason wills and the heart wishes. If you need me and I you for life, that need must hold us until death, or it is worthless and a delusion. Promises can neither add to, or injure it, and be it one week, one year, or a lifetime hence, it must hold and remain the same divine obligation. Beyond that, I shall value a faith and fidelity, given without asking, and bound by no promise, a thousand times more than all the vows uttered by mortal lips. I did not ask Aunt Comfort to care for me a helpless child and not her own; she gave me home and love without it. She would not ask me to sacrifice one hour for her selfish needs, and yet I am ready, and shall if need be, to devote all my life solely for her in return. This and this only is true and unselfish love, and all that is worth the name."

Then they changed the subject into a discussion of ways and means to rescue her father from his wilderness abode.

"He has, so far as I could discover, forgotten his early life," asserted Martin, "and while he seemed disturbed and in a way almost touched by the sight of your pictured face, acted as if the past was a blank in memory. Old Cy he recalled well enough. In fact—and it was curious—his coming there appeared to strike him as perfectly natural, and in a few days they became like two old schoolboys playing at keeping house. I'll wager at this very moment they are content and talking about their traps, the squirrels, and how thick the ice is on the lake, or how deep the snow is. They once were natural-born companions in outdoor sports and such ways of living, and now are joined enjoying the same again. I took old Cy along solely to identify this hermit, but builded wiser than I knew, and it turned out more than fortunate. I was also so sure I had found Amzi that I took in extra clothing for him, and before I left, sent our guides to a settlement for more provisions and needful articles. It was by one of them that I sent you that birch-bark letter, for I was without even a pencil. We also repaired and improved the cabin; built an addition for the guide I left there for emergencies; they have meat and food supplies for a year, and when spring comes, I'll take you and Aunt Comfort to pay them a visit. To go there now is impossible, except to a hardy woodsman on snowshoes, for the only highways are locked by ice in that high latitude, and snow is likely to be a foot or more deep. I thought of all a man could to make your poor father safe and comfortable, and believe he is. I will do anything you ask, will take you and Aunt Comfort there when possible, and then you must judge what is best to be done. If old Cy's companionship has the effect I hope it will on him, he may be changed into a more normal state of mind, and ready and even anxious to return to civilization. The long years of solitary life have made him almost demented, however, and nearly obliterated even the memory of you."

Much more—already known—was related by Martin, and when the evening ended, a few words of defense for her own resolution were uttered by Angie, and must also be quoted.

"You have rendered my poor father and myself," she said, "a service for which all you ask of me is no more than just reward. Some day it shall be yours. And now as partial payment I will tell you what has never passed my lips, and God's truth.

"Once and when a silly girl I grew into a strangely sweet illusion. I did not know what it meant then, but blindly believed it must last for life, and that you would seem and be ever the same to me. It was selfish, as first love always is, but I did not know it. Now I do, and that the only love worth calling such means self-sacrifice. Then you went away, and I tried to forget you. It was useless, for none can force thought or feeling either to come or to go. For years I suffered as all fondly foolish girls must, and in silence. It was like the Saviour's

CHOPPING MINCE MEAT.

cross to me, and I helpless to escape its burden. In time and by trying to assume others' burdens, my own seemed lighter. I have never complained, for it was useless. I could not will you back if I tried, and the only peace I found was in living for Aunt Comfort and my pupils. At first I hoped you might return some day, but finally forced that hope away. Other men and good ones tried to whisper love to me. It made no difference, for I felt no response. I certainly would have done so if I could, but I could not. It seemed to me God had willed me to live my life alone and for others, and even now I feel the same. Your finding my father, your unaccountable impulse to return here, then going back to him again are all a part of my fate. I may be wrong, but I can no more escape my sense of duty, and that it is God's will you should bring me this added one, than I could put you out of my heart long ago. My duty now seems first, and when that is performed, and no one needs me more than you, I will be yours until death parts us. I could not do otherwise if I would, and I would not if I could."

And when he parted from her, never before had he believed one woman could seem so priceless.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THANKSGIVING DAY.

Thanksgiving had always been the most important day in Aunt Comfort's calendar, and latterly the one most anticipated by Nezer. For many weeks previous to its advent he began to count the days ere it was due, and when preparations came, he was not only a boy ready and willing to do all that was asked, but one who seemed to be hunting for chores and chances to assist. First came the selection of the fattest turkey in the flock a few days ahead, and his cooping and extra feeding in due preparation for the grand event. In this occult matter Nezer displayed almost abnormal acumen, and could tell by the bird's strut and how he held his wings which one to choose. Chickens must also be selected and shut up, and here again Nezer's night visit to the roost and choice of fowls showed discretion. The yellowest ripe pumpkin was picked out from the pile by him, and all manner of smaller vegetables as well. He cheerfully carried a big basket of good things to old Cy and others, and poor families a mile away for Aunt Comfort; he made no complaint at chopping wood, and when the big oven over the fireplace must be cleaned out, he was anxious to do it. By the time the all-important morning arrived he had reached a state of almost delirious excitement, and was usually underfoot all the time while watching the women folks preparing tarts and jellies and filling the many kinds of pies, to be deftly transferred to the deep oven on a long-handled shovel. To keep him quiet he was allowed to help, and Angie usually put an apron on him and set him paring apples or chopping mince-meat.

When preparations were well on and Aunt Comfort, who never forgot to go to church, hurried away for the brief service, then Nezer's expectancy reached its critical stage, and not even a circus coming into town would have tempted him out of the house. If company came, his excitement was increased, and so keen was his anticipation that his best clothes were donned with cheerful resignation. The only rift within the lute of his perfect joy was having to wait so long and when the banquet was served, to be the last to receive his portion. He made amends, however, in quantity, for his plate had to be passed up three times, and he usually found room for two pieces of mince pie besides.

When the joyful day came again, both Aunt Comfort and Angie set about making it memorable, and invited a gathering that was likely to crowd their home to its limit. First, Dr. Sol and his wife, and Martin, of course, then his mother, sister and her family, consisting of her husband and three children, from Riverton, as well. Then Aunt Lorey, whose ability to assist at and enjoy such an affair was even superior to her utility at funerals, was included.

"I don't know where we can put all Martin's family to sleep," asserted Angie, somewhat ruefully, when she and Aunt Comfort began counting their guests. "The out-of-town people will need four rooms, and we have only two spare ones furnished."

"We won't worry 'bout such trifles," Aunt Comfort responded; "we kin double up somehow, and Nezer kin sleep on the settle."

She had set about a celebration that was one, and the matter of crowding was a trifle of no account, and the event was one the like of which her ancient dwelling had not held since the joyous days of her youth. For three days the women folks were more than busy, and the store of good things provided seemed limitless. Twice the big oven had to be heated to bake all the pies, and again to hold the two turkeys and tempting spare rib, and Nezer's nose was nearly blistered while basting them. Martin obtained permission to add his mite, and he sent to the city for flowers enough to turn the whole house into a bower, and had Aunt Comfort known what they cost, she would have fainted. It mattered not to him, however, for he was in that state of mind when money seemed like the dry leaves of autumn compared to Angie's happiness.

Nezer was almost beside himself with joy when the supreme day arrived, but when the somewhat citified Riverton party drove up and two pert and pretty girls about his own age alighted with the rest, he, for perhaps the second time in his life, felt scared.

Of the introductions, hand-shakings and genteel efforts to make everybody feel at home and happy, nothing need be said.

Dr. Sol and family soon joined the party, and when formality had merged into the happy-go-lucky cheerfulness of such an occasion and the banquet was served, no pen can describe its all-around enjoyment or hilarity.

[To Be Continued.]

Tender and True.

Squire Benson was often consulted in cases of family difficulty resulting from the storm and stress of time or temper, and he derived a good deal of amusement from the tales told in his little office. "Is it true that you threw something at Mike that caused the swelling over his eye?" the squire asked a little wiry Irishwoman who appeared sobbing at his door one day half an hour after her husband had departed. "Yis, I did," said the little woman, catching her breath, "but I niver wint to hurt him, and he knows it well. We'd just come home from me cousin's wedding, an' I was feeling kind of soft to Mike, and I axed him if he loved me as much as he did the day we was married; and—and he was so slow answering me that I up wid the mop an' flung it at him, Squire Benson; for if we poor women don't have love our hearts just breaks inside of us!"—Youth's Companion.

Our Forefathers.

A little storm-tossed vessel cast its anchor off the barren shores of Cape Cod, on the twenty-first day of November, 1620, at the point that is now Provincetown Harbor. On board were 72 men and women, with brave hearts and fixed purpose, and 30 children. Their intention was to go further south and their grant of land was made out for a point near the Hudson, but the voyage had been long and boisterous and the captain of the ship had grown tired of the expedition and was anxious to be rid of his crew; so he stopped here and refused to go further. As a flight of birds determined Columbus' destination, so an irritable captain gave to New England the honor of being the home of our fourefathers.—From "The Nation's Corner-Stone," by Mary L. Kane, in Four-Track News.

Last Day of the Stoddards.

When Poe's name was mentioned Richard Henry Stoddard was likely to become irascible and explosive, and he often related with keen zest how Emerson had characterized Poe as "The Jingle Man." When Stoddard was a budding poet, Poe on one occasion doubted the originality of one of his poems, called him a liar, and threatened to throw him down the editorial stairs. Hence Stoddard's lack of enthusiasm about Poe. "No," he said one day, "I will not be quoted about Poe. Every time I have described Poe as he actually was when I knew him, I have brought down upon my head a torrent of abuse. He was a scamp and a deadbeat, and I know of few who, writing so little, wrote so much that was bad."—Reader Magazine.

Cell for Prison Committee.

At the New England Methodist Conference held in Springfield, Mass., recently, a good brother wished to announce a meeting of the committee on prisons. The committee was to meet in one of the classrooms, which were numbered. Full of his work and with mind intent on the business which was to be considered the brother arose and announced: "The committee on prisons will meet in cell No. 1 immediately after dinner."—N. Y. Times